



## STRATEGIC THINKING STYLE AND READINESS-FOR-CHANGE

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### Abstract:

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate and identify the relationship between managers' strategic thinking style and staff's readiness-for-change. As for its nature, this study is considered as 'applied' research and methodologically it is descriptive-correlational. The population of the study was composed of 150 subjects where, based on Morgan and Krejcie scale, 110 subjects were randomly sampled out. To collect the required data, the researcher applied the most effective instrument- the questionnaire. The validity of both questionnaires was approved by the experts in the field and their reliability was calculated through Cronbach Alpha, where it was 0.870 for the strategic thinking questionnaire and 0.902 for the readiness-for-change one. To analyze the data, the researcher used descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation, and Linear Regression. The results of the study showed that there was a significantly positive and direct relationship between managers' strategic thinking style and staff's readiness-for-change. Therefore, it can be concluded that managers with strategic thinking style are required in an organization so that they can explore the factors

effective on its performance and by analyzing them; they can appreciate the environment properly in order to identify the opportunities and make correct decisions.

**Keywords:** strategic thinking, readiness-for-change, change

## 1. Introduction

Strategic thinking has been under focus in strategic thinking management in the past decade and many researchers have emphasized the significance of managers' getting equipped with strategic thinking. Strategic thinking is a cognitive process relying on strategic measures and decisions, and by applying a quality comparison, new creative ideas can be developed. Managers' improperly understanding the concept and nature of strategic thinking prevents them from achieving the strategic thinking achievements and targets (Stacey, 2005: 12). To incorporate the complex and various prospective changes, organizational managers should, in addition to their enjoying strategic thinking, develop some would-be required capacities for on-time changes in their organizations so that they can keep their agility in critical and very complex situations. To evaluate the strategic thinking level in an organization, strategic thinking factors must be first identified and then studied and measured (Judge, 2011). Among all the strategic thinking models, Jin Lidtka's 5 Factor Strategic Thinking Model has been widely accepted and used. Compared with other models, Lidtka's 5 Factor Strategic Thinking Model is more compatible with the Iranian current situation for the evaluation of strategic thinking. Therefore, the researcher selected Jin Lidtka's Model to evaluate the strategic thinking model in the present study.

Strategic thinking means organizing the disorders and chaotic situations, and with strategic thinking managers can now establish discipline, order and unity in his mind and integrate his thinking processes. Successful leaders act in such a way that they are stepping in future, so strategic thinking has clarified the creativity opportunities for them and they can affect and build up the future (Nekoezadeh et al., 2014). In the past 25 years, studies have shown that if strategic thinking, as an important factor, is lagging behind and is sluggish among the high level managers it will negatively affect the organizational performance. For a manager, it is crucial that he know and deeply understand the ruling atmosphere in business. His understanding of the atmosphere does not end up with the identification of the factors in the environment; rather, his perceptual and intuitional discovery of unknown angles of the situation and creation of ideas play a great role as well. Strategic thinking is an approach that leads to the formation and development of this intuition and can help managers decipher the business atmosphere and create new values. For a manager who

wishes to change his environment and future, mastering strategic thinking proves vital. Strategic thinking, at two levels of individualistic and organizational levels, with the special comprehensiveness and prediction it creates, can, on the one hand, help staff better understand their organization and environment and create numerous creativities and, on the other hand, help develop the grounds for better interactions and relationships among managers and staff. Strategic thinking can also help better use their [staff's] genius and creativity in the organization. Strategic thinking is a way through which people in an organization reflect, evaluate, view the world, and build up the future for themselves and others. There are five fundamental commands for the development of strategic thinking in managers: 1) before getting information, try to discover the needs for getting responses from the environment; 2) before responding the discovered needs, try to discover the unfulfilled needs; 3) before attending the secondary goals, try to focus on the final ones; 4) before developing potentials for production, think about the potentials for competitiveness; and 5) in moving towards the target, before thinking about speed, think about the shortcuts. (Kiani and Ghafarian, 2005).

Change is a reality which individuals, groups, and organizations should attend and prioritize in their measures to help survive. Sometimes the process of change in organizations is resisted by others where these resistances are at times not destructive but very constructive and bring about desirable results because they help reinforce positive interactionist conflict and positive dialogs and can promote the change choices which result from the interactions. However, if resistance is illogical and excessive, it can potentially harm the future of the organization- which must be prevented (Moqimi and Ramazan, 2010). Rabinz (2007) maintains that changing individuals should begin with changing their attitude and thought about themselves and their life after which the change can manifest itself in the behavior and performance of the organization. In changing the individuals, managers try to commit changes based on their skills, attitudes, thoughts, and their expectations (Erabi, 2006). Managers with strategic thinking power today are one of the fundamental necessities of organizations which try to survive in this competitive world. This need leads us to a path where we should ask ourselves how we can educate managers who enjoy divergent and open minds with strategic thinking and how we place them in top positions to direct the organizations in a correct route to success. On the one hand, today most of the organizations are subject to changes and any change needs staff and managers who are adaptable and compatible with the changes. Here, social interaction can effectively and properly play a role for most of the managers and leaders as a key element in management and organizational changes (Nekoezadeh et al., 2014). Generally, strategic thinking is a divergent, dynamic and pragmatic thought that develops with a continuous interaction with the

environment, its analysis and creativity, and in fact it is a continual process whose goal is to identify a complex environment and deconstruct its complexity. If a manager or leader wishes to effectively have a role, he must establish strategic thinking in himself. In strategic thinking, multifaceted issues are simplified without being considered simple, and their secrets for success lie in prospective hopes, positive thinking, optimism and continual attempts (Bagherloo et al., 2014). If environmental constructs were thoroughly sustainable and constant, if staff's skills and abilities were always updated and never voided, and if tomorrow were always the same as today, organizational change would not be needed and would have no significance to the managers; however, the real world is always subject to change and variation and it requires that an organization always keep its staff changing and adapted (Rabinz, 2007). The main purpose of the present study was to identify some of the issues related to the concept of strategic thinking and its relationship with the organizational staff's readiness-for-change which could help the leaders change their environment and build up their organization's future. Further, this study was to find out if there was any relationship between managers' strategic thinking and staff's readiness-for-change.

## **2. The theoretical and conceptual framework**

In this framework, the relationship between North Khorassan Water Organization managers' strategic thinking and staff's readiness-for-change level was studied. In this model, strategic thinking is divided into four elements of strategic thinking, systematic attitude, and focus on goal, intelligent opportunism, and on-time thinking where each element of the strategic thinking is in close and direct relationship with the staff's readiness-for-change. In the present study, strategic thinking was the independent variable and the staff's readiness-for-change as the dependent variable. This model enjoyed the elements which Jin Lidtko employed in 1998.

## **3. The study background and related literature**

In a study entitled 'An analysis of organizational change capacity and strategic thinking relationship', Tavakoli et al. (2015) concluded that organizations which enjoyed a high-level strategic thinking had a high organizational change potential, too. It was also clarified that there was a positive and significant correlation between all five elements of strategic thinking (systematic attitude, focus on goal, intelligent opportunism, hypothesis-orientation, and on-time thinking) and organizational change potential. Moreover, the findings approved of the positive and significant correlation between

strategic thinking, human resource, social infrastructures, and organizational change potential.

In their study entitled 'A study of the relationship between strategic thinking and emotional intelligence', Nekoezadeh et al. (2014) came to this conclusion that there was a significant and positive relationship between strategic thinking and emotional intelligence, and among the strategic thinking dimensions, the 'creativity' dimension enjoyed the highest correlation with the emotional intelligence. In their study entitled 'A study of strategic thinking and its challenges in Iranian organizations', Bagherloo et al. (2014) found out that strategic thinking is one of the most required skills of managers and leaders in different organizational levels and that it is an instrument for the creation of values and creativity in the staff. Moreover they maintained that strategic thinking generates innovations in the organizational environment and that the challenges identified in their study would pave the way for planning appropriate strategies to breed creativity and equip the staff and managers with this powerful means [strategic thinking]. In their study entitled 'Competitive intelligence and its effect on the development of managers' strategic thinking': a comparative case study of the private and governmental banks in Mazandaran', Ghafari et al. (2013) concluded that there was a significant relationship between competitive intelligence in decision making of the private and governmental banks. Moreover, the findings showed that the private banks enjoyed a better position in possessing competitive intelligence and attending the principles of strategic thinking than the governmental banks did.

Adelnejad and Shariatmadari (2013) conducted a research under the title 'A study of organizational staff-managers' perspective on the relationship between managers' strategic thinking and the human resource productivity in Iran's tax organization' and found out that there was a direct relationship between strategic thinking, managers' progress-oriented scientific approach and hypothesis, on-time thinking, and human resource productivity. Also, the highest effect evaluated belonged to the variable 'managers' progress-oriented scientific approach and hypothesis', and the direct effect of the same variable was more complete than its indirect upshot. Ketchi (2013) carried out a study entitled 'The process of integrating the sustainable strategic thinking' and concluded that thought planning could highly affect the strategic thinking and by using the thought planning framework one could effectively help the strategic thinking that could lead to a more strategic and more sustainable results. Haykook (2012) studied strategic thinking conducting a research entitled 'Strategic thinking' and concluded that strategic thinking could bring about competitive advantage in an organization and develop a vision for it. Strategy has two dimensions: one refers to the process of strategic planning in an organization and the other refers to an intra-organizational comprehensive attempt.

In a study entitled 'Plan-oriented approach for organizational change in a military organization', Barbox (2011) concluded that change in a military organization led to the reconstruction of the organization and re-planning of the relationships, structures and communication. In fact, he developed this plan-oriented approach for organizational change by combining the two comprehensive approaches of cognitive and structural views. Richard (2011) conducted a study entitled 'Organizational change capacity concept' and attempted to define the concept of organizational capacity and render a framework for organizational change and identify its dimensions and elements. He maintained that organizational change capacity included: 1) content dimension: this contains resources that facilitate the process of change; 2) process dimension: this refers to executive principles of change; 3) learning dimension: this dimension refers to intra-organizational capacity. It can be concluded that change capacity is heavily dependent on the management in an organization and its conditions. The main objective of the present study was: to identify and scrutinize the relationship between managers' strategic thinking style and the staff's readiness-for-change in North Khorassan Water and Wastewater Corporation.

### **3.1 Research hypothesis**

*"There is a relationship between North Khorassan Water and Wastewater Corporation managers' strategic thinking style and the staff's readiness-for-change."*

## **4. Research methodology**

The researcher employed an applied descriptive-correlational method to collect the required data and carry out the present study. The method to collect the data was library and questionnaire based. The population of the study was composed of 150 subjects where, based on Morgan and Krejcie Scale, 110 subjects were randomly sampled out. To collect the required data, the researcher used Rahmani Quri Darband's Strategic Thinking Questionnaire (2014) and Kernel's Readiness-for-change Questionnaire (2007). To value the reliability of the questionnaires, the researcher used the Cronbach's Alpha where the results were 0.870 for the strategic thinking questionnaire and 0.902 for the readiness-for-change one. The validity of both questionnaires was approved by the experts in the field, and by using the statistical tables of SPSS V21 including frequency, percentage, and response type and by applying the descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation, and Linear Regression separately, the data was analyzed to examine the probable relationship between the hypothetical variables.

#### 4.1 Examining the normality of variable distribution

Before testing the relationship between the variables, the researcher examined the normality of the variable distribution. One of the methods to scrutinize the normality of variable distribution is the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Having been tested, the data were proved to be normal.

#### 4.2 Hypothesis testing results

- The main hypothesis: *"There is a relationship between North Khorassan Water and Wastewater Corporation managers' strategic thinking style and the staff's readiness-for-change."*
- *There is no relationship between managers' strategic thinking and staff's readiness-for-change.  $H_0:P=0$*
- *There is a relationship between managers' strategic thinking and staff's readiness-for-change.  $H_1:P\neq 0$*

**Table 1:** Pearson correlation: The relationship between strategic thinking and readiness-for-change

Variable	Readiness-for-change	Strategic thinking
Pearson correlation coefficient of readiness-for-change	1	0.547
p-value		0.000
No.	110	110
Pearson correlation coefficient of strategic thinking	0.547	1
p-value	0.000	
No.	110	110

With regard to the fact that the  $p$  value obtained equals 0.000 and the fact that it is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis,  $H_0$ , is rejected. It can be observed that the Pearson Correlation Coefficient between managers' strategic thinking and staff's readiness-for-change equals 0.547 which shows that there is a direct and significant relationship between strategic thinking and staff's readiness-for-change. That is to say, with the increase of strategic thinking variable value, the readiness-for-change variable value increases and the variable changes are in one direction. Moreover, the coefficient of determination between the two variables equals 0.54; that is, the staff's motivation to change in the organization through strategic thinking is predictable at 54 percent, so the main hypothesis *'There is a relationship between North Khorassan Water and Wastewater Corporation managers' strategic thinking style and the staff's readiness-for-change.'* is approved.

## 5. Results and discussions

Managers and staff's strategic thinking results in an organization's outperforming the others in the competitive market, facilitating the achievement of goals and visions, entering the new areas, and generating new values for the organization and the profiteers. Managers being equipped with strategic thinking are the requirement for an effective change in an organization, especially when they are preparing the staff for change. If a manager is not able to deal with appropriate changes in the organization, the change will turn into a crisis, which, in some cases, will result in the organizations' failure. When prominent managers face complex and difficult situations and changes, they should change their angle of looking at the issue. An organization's managers and staff must focus on the organization's goals where this [focus] allows the managers and staff to effectively use their energy to achieve the goals set for the organization. To conclude, it is essential to state that in this competitive world and era, technological creativities, changes, chaos, and discontinuities must be incorporated and instead of resisting against the changes, one should try to help facilitate the process of transformation and support the change plans. This can be possible by a manager who is equipped with strategic thinking. In this study, strategic thinking in an organization was referred to as a means to generate values and creativity in the staff and innovations in the organization's atmosphere. Thus, it can be concluded that strategic thinking can help managers and staff learn more and better from an organization's work environment. This learning helps the organization to appreciate the market realities, regulations and work irregularities better and move forward faster than its competitors; it also helps the organization's human resources to focus on value-making activities.

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